

The Rev. Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
2nd Sunday of Easter/Year C
April 18, 2010
Text: John 21:1-19

Recognizing the Divine

Some of you may or may not know that I matriculated-meaning, I attended-The General Theological Seminary in New York City. The seminary is situated in the heart of Manhattan, in the hustle and bustle of city life! Ninth Avenue, where GTS sits, has its share of deli's, pizza parlors, barbershops and nail salons. Diners sit opposite one another and the CVC drugstore is only a stone's throw away. The best produce market is maybe 4 or 5 blocks away. On a good day we could walk over to the pier in 15 or 20 minutes. Mass transportation was excellent not like here in St. Louis where public transportation slows down to a snail's pace after a certain hour! Buses, subway trains, and taxis are in abundance and will get you to where you want to go at anytime. And if you are into the arts like I am there are a plethora of opportunities to experience theatre, dance, opera, and art. New York City one of my most favorite places in the entire world! Oh, did I mention that I had a lovely educational experience?!

Right before starting here at St. Barnabas, I was given the gift of an airline ticket to my favorite city. Call me crazy but THE place that I have got to go whenever I am in New York is Times Square as I did this last time. There are literally hundreds of people of every race, creed and nationality lining the sidewalks so you can barely walk at times. It is possible to overhear lots of different languages and dialects. The whole experience is like a sensory overload but I simply love it. I love it while I am in the midst of it. And I am grateful to come home to a quiet house.

We live in a world where there is so much going on daily. We are bombarded with television and Internet, radio, print media, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and such, not to mention ordinary life noises. We've learned how to multi-task which may or may not add to our stress. But truth be told-there comes a point whether we are at work, school, or home when we simply want a little quiet, a little less stimulus. Still life continues and we may come to that point when one can feel overwhelmed and over stimulated and so we seek comfort in a variety of ways. I may be dating myself but do

some of you remember the old Calgon commercial? “Calgon, take me away!” the spokes model sighed as she sat reveling in her bubble bath. Oh, that sounds marvelous, doesn’t it! Some of us may seek refuge from the hustle and bustle by going shopping or gardening, eating our favorite comfort foods. I invite you to think for a moment. What are some of the ways you take refuge? How do you take care of yourself?

In the lectionary readings appointed over the last few weeks you and I have heard stories of how overwhelming and stressful life was for the followers of Jesus. We have journeyed with them from the events in Jerusalem to the cross on Calvary. And we have journeyed with them on the other side of tragedy, the news of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances. These events would not only overwhelm and change the lives of Jesus’ friends but also change the world for all time.

With all the disciples had been through they needed to get away from it all. They needed some space! There were no shopping malls, no Calgon bath oil beads... but they did try to find solace in what they knew best-fishing! But as we heard in the Gospel reading though they had spent an entire night out on the water they hadn’t caught a thing. All night these “professional” fishermen sat huddled in their boat, throwing out their nets and pulling in nothing but seaweed. Their outing was a disaster!

As the sun began to rise, the seven saw a figure walking along the shore gesturing and calling out to them to try dropping their nets on the other side of the boat. They do and their nets swell with an incredible catch. They can barely pull them in when the Beloved Disciple suddenly realizes that the figure on the shore is no stranger. It is Jesus! There was something about having had spent so much intimate time with Jesus that caused him to recognize his Lord and Savior. The same held true for Peter who quickly dove into the water leaving his friends behind to handle the nets and fish.

In our Collect for today, we remembered how Christ, “the blessed Son, made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread.” We prayed that God might “open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.”

The risen Christ offers the Beloved Disciple and Peter in all of us a chance to recognize and encounter the Divine in the day to day. We probably won’t encounter visions of him in flashes of light or in burning

bushes. Hopefully, we won't be knocked off our horses like Saul in today's first lesson.

Still, he somehow makes his presence known among us in the hungry and well-fed, in the well-to-do and the homeless, in the young and the old, in neighbors and in strangers, in people who may not look like us or speak like us. We encounter him within ourselves, in our struggles and weaknesses. We encounter him even in the most routine and familiar circumstances of our over-busy lives.

And we will continue to encounter him as we build up this community of faith; as we show hospitality to those who live in this neighborhood; as we invite family and friends to join us for fun and for worship, and as we extend a personal invitation to someone who may have stopped coming here for whatever reason to come back to this spiritual home.

In order to rise to the challenge we must take Christ's invitation to draw closer to him, to know him better for ourselves. You know, when the disciples caught up with Jesus along the shore he had prepared for them a simple meal of fish and bread. He said to them, "Come and eat."

The risen Christ continues to call us away to rest and refresh ourselves with him, to be nourished and strengthened by our meal of bread and wine, Christ's Body and Blood, for our lives and work.

May our lives be not so overwhelmed that we fail to recognize Christ's presence among us. May we be forever changed because Christ has made his presence known. Amen.